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To: [Bohan, Suzanne](#)
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 Sunset Behind Charlie Russell Square Butte

Photo courtesy of Rick and Susie Graetz

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Mountain West News is a
program of the
O'Connor Center for the Rocky Mountain West at
The University of Montana

**Friday,
July 17, 2015**

Produced by Shellie Nelson, MW News Editor

Editor's notes:

Thursday's edition was emailed by mistake today. I apologize for the duplication, and here is today's edition.

- Shellie Nelson, editor

In the **Rockies today**, developments on issues we've been following.

ProPublica offers another installment in its series on the Colorado River, with this article focusing on how surface and ground water are linked, and why some states have yet to acknowledge that relationship.

Utah Gov. Gary Herbert has asked the state Attorney General to investigate if the Bureau of Land Management's 2007 closure of a road into Recapture Canyon was legal, with state Rep. Mike Noel of Kanab saying Wednesday that he had documents showing San Juan County had legal authority over the road.

San Juan County Commissioner Phil Lyman was recently convicted of federal charges arising out of his role in organizing an illegal ATV ride into the canyon in May of 2014.

The New York Stock Exchange suspended trading of stock of the Alpha Natural Resources, a coal company recently put on notice by the state of Wyoming that its financial situation no longer allowed it to self-bond, as the company entered talks with creditors about a possible bankruptcy filing.

And in Canada, the premiers of the country agreed on a national energy strategy, and are discussing the possibility of a national wildfire strategy as well.

Alberta is investigating a pipeline break at an oilsands operation that released bitumen, water and sand along the pipeline, and there was an oil train derailment in northeastern Montana Thursday night that spilled 35,000 gallons of oil.

Quote of the day:

[Mountain West Voices](#)

[On the Bookshelf](#)

[Mountain West Perspectives](#)

[A Look Ahead](#)

A Look Ahead

June 19-Aug.4: National Geographic, University of Montana offer a [free, online course for educators on watershed education](#)

On the Bookshelf

Barbara Theroux of Fact & Fiction reviews Jack Nisbet's ["Ancient Places"](#)

Mountain West Perspectives

Montana's two-year colleges [revamp education to meet changing workplace demands](#)

Mountain West Voices

Hear the stories of the Mountain West:

[MOVING ON, BUT NO WAY GONE: Coal in America](#)
5/18/2015:
[Prom Dress Mecca](#)
4/3/2015:
[Remembering Iwo Jima](#)
2/27/2015:
[Cowboy For Hire](#)
1/28/2015:
[INSIDE LOOKING OUT: Native Voices in a Montana Prison](#)
12/23/2014:

"If you don't connect the two, then you don't understand the system. And if you don't understand the system, I don't know how in the hell you're going to make any kind of judgment about how much water you've got to work with."

John Bredehoeft, a leading hydrogeologist who for many years managed the U.S. government's western states water program for the U.S. Geological Survey, discussing [California and Arizona's unwillingness to admit the connection between surface water and aquifers](#).
- ProPublica.org

Rockies today

[Utah governor orders investigation into closure of Recapture Canyon road](#)

The Bureau of Land Management closed a road into Recapture Canyon in 2007 to motorized traffic to protect ancient artifacts and cliff dwellings in the Utah area, and in 2014, San Juan County Commissioner Phil Lyman organized a ride into the canyon to protest the closure, and now Gov. Gary Herbert has ordered the state Attorney General to investigate whether the BLM's action was legal.

Salt Lake Tribune; July 17

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[Montana U.S. senators support permanent funding for Land, Water fund](#)

U.S. Sen. Steve Daines was criticized for his earlier vote against permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a 50-year-old program that has provided \$16 billion in conservation projects, including \$400 million in Montana, but he has joined colleague U.S. Sen. Jon Tester in supporting North Carolina Sen. Richard Burr's S. 338, which permanently funds the program.

Flathead Beacon; July 17

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[Oil train derailment in N.E. Montana spills 35,000 gallons of oil](#)

BNSF is investigating why 22 cars on a 106-car train carrying crude oil left the tracks in northeastern Montana near Culbertson Thursday night, spilling an estimated 35,000 gallons of oil.

Flathead Beacon (AP); July 17

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[Pipeline spills 1.5M gallons of bitumen, water at Alberta oilsands operation](#)

A pipeline break reported Wednesday at Nexen's Long Lake oilsands operation in northeastern Alberta released an estimated 1.5 million gallons of bitumen, water and sand onto roughly four acres, nearly all of it along the pipeline. The company and Alberta Energy Regulator are investigating the cause of the rupture.

Calgary Herald (Canadian Press); July 17

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[NYSE suspends trading on company that mines coal in Wyoming](#)

Alpha Natural Resources is one of the largest coal miners in the Powder River Basin in Wyoming, but the coal miner has fallen on hard times and is in talks with its creditors about a possible bankruptcy filing, which prompted the New York Stock Exchange to suspend trading of the company's shares on Thursday. Wyoming recently notified the company that it no longer qualified to be self-bonding for reclamation.

Casper Star-Tribune; July 17

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[Canadian leaders agree to 'aspirational' national energy strategy](#)

At the annual summer conference of Canada's premiers, the leaders reached an agreement Friday on the country's natural energy strategy, which includes Alberta Premier Rachel Notley's "balanced approach" on energy and the environment.

Toronto Globe and Mail; July 17

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[B.C., Saskatchewan premiers seek coordination on wildfires](#)

At the annual summer gathering of Canadian premiers in St. John this week, British Columbia Premier Christy Clark, whose province has already burned through its \$60 million wildfire fighting budget, and Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall, pressed for a national strategy on fighting wildfires.

Toronto Globe and Mail; July 17

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[Heat, wildfires in Canada's prairie provinces burn industries' bottom lines](#)

This summer's heat, drought and wildfires have shut down mining operations and driven people from their homes in Northern Saskatchewan and the province has opened its lands to ranchers to graze their cattle. In Alberta, Parkland County was the first to declare an agricultural disaster due to the drought and other counties are planning to follow suit.

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Toronto Globe and Mail; July 17

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[California, Arizona continue to overestimate water supplies](#)

Although the federal government and a number of states have already drawn the connection between surface water and aquifers, that relationship appears to yet be a mystery in California and Arizona, where the latest drought has increased those states' reliance on aquifers to 60 percent and 50 percent, respectively. *Another in ProPublica's series on the Colorado River.*

ProPublica.org; July 17

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Water

[Another lawsuit filed to block changes to Clean Water Act](#)

California-based Pacific Legal Foundation filed a lawsuit in federal court in Minnesota on behalf of ranchers in New Mexico, California and Washington state, as well as Minnesota-based Pierce Investment Co., challenging the Environmental Protection Agency's rule to clarify the waters of the United States that fall under the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act.

Durango Herald (AP); July 17

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[Warmer waters challenge sockeye salmon swimming to Idaho](#)

The waters of the Columbia and Snake rivers are an estimated six degrees warmer than usual this year, and steelhead and sockeye are dying in tributaries such as the Willamette and Deschutes rivers in Oregon, and Idaho Fish and Game biologists shortened the swim of five sockeye salmon by capturing them at the last of eight dams the migrating salmon must navigate on their way from the Pacific to the Sawtooth Valley, and put them in the cool waters of the Eagle Hatchery.

Idaho Statesman; July 17

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[Water warning issued after fertilizer spill in Southern Alberta](#)

The spill of nearly 5,000 gallons of urea ammonium nitrate, used in fertilizer, onto private land in southern Alberta prompted Alberta Environment for users of water from the Little Bow River or the Travers Reservoir to limit consumption until further notice.

Calgary Herald (Canadian Press); July 17

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Opinion

[Dear John \(Boehner\): Fish did not cause California's drought](#)

House Speaker John Boehner and other Republicans in Congress believe that California's drought is man-made, citing the 3 million acre-feet of water required to be released from reservoirs for the benefit of endangered Delta smelt and salmon, and presumably Idaho U.S. Reps. Mike Simpson and Raul Labrador agree, given their affirmative votes on a measure that passed the House that would reduce the amount of water farmers are required to allow to flow by, overturning state law and a federal-state agreement, but the true culprits in California's water woes are the lack of precipitation and overpumping of aquifers. *A column by Rocky Barker.*

Idaho Statesman; July 17

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[Proposed copper mine in Montana riles Smith River fans](#)

Proponents of a proposed copper mine in north-central Montana near a tributary of the Smith River vow that this mine will be different and that it will not affect the river, a red-ribbon trout fishery and permit-only float through deep limestone canyons, but opponents believe otherwise, and Christopher Solomon documents his conversations with folks on both sides of the debate and his firsthand experience of a float down the river in this column for the New York Times.

New York Times; July 17

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Beyond the region

[Drought forces fishing restrictions on 38 rivers in Washington state](#)

Washington Fish and Wildlife Department officials announced fishing restrictions on 38 rivers in the state, with all fishing banned on 21 of those rivers, beginning Saturday, and "hoot owl" restrictions, which prohibits fishing from 2 p.m. to midnight on 16 other rivers, including the Spokane River and its tributaries. Sturgeon fishing closed temporarily on Thursday in the Columbia River.

Spokane Spokesman-Review; July 17

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[Interior Dept. seeks new rules to keep coal pollution out of streams](#)

The rules proposed by the Interior Department to keep pollution from coal mining out of streams is aimed primarily at the practice of mountaintop mining, which is most common in states in the Appalachian Mountains, and would require companies to test water quality in area streams

before, during and after mining operations and for companies to restore lands and streams where mining occurs to "the uses they were capable of supporting before mining activities." Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin III blasted the new rules as just another volley in President Obama's "war on coal."

New York Times; July 17

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Community:

[Montana PSC considers 'net metering' fee request from MDU](#)

Environment:

[New thermal activity temporarily closes road in Yellowstone Park](#)

Economy:

[Monsanto's Wheat Technology Center opens in Idaho](#)

Tribes:

[Blackfeet tribal leader's legacy reaches back for more than 6 decades](#)

Environment:

[Utah legislators get update on public lands initiative](#)

Politics:

[Alberta's new premier sets new tone on energy](#)

Community:

[Idaho county's zoning commission OKs thoroughly modern chicken coop](#)

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